

## Diabetes Self-Management: Heart Disease and Diabetes

People with diabetes are at very high risk for developing heart and blood vessel disease that can lead to heart attack and stroke. More than 65% of people with diabetes die from heart disease or stroke. This often occurs at a younger age in those with diabetes as compared to those without diabetes.

Uncontrolled blood sugar levels over time can stiffen and damage blood vessels. This damage increases the risk for heart attack and stroke, and they become even more likely when complicated by elevated levels of blood pressure and cholesterol, and smoking. There are actions that you can take to lower this risk.

- Monitor your blood sugar and keep it as close to normal as possible. Aim for 90-130mg/dl before meals and less than 180 mg/dl two hours after eating.
- Monitor your blood pressure and keep it below the recommended 130/80.
- Control blood fats. The HDL cholesterol should be greater than 40mg/dl in men or 50 in women; the “bad” LDL cholesterol should be less than 100mg/dl; and triglycerides should be less than 150mg/dl.
- Get moderate intensity activity for 30 or more minutes most every day of the week.
- Attain and maintain a recommended weight.
- Don’t smoke.
- Learn to use stress management techniques. Develop a relaxation routine, including exercise, deep breathing and laughter.

Take action to reduce your risk for heart attack and stroke. Work with your health care team to devise a heart healthy plan that works for you.

## Recognizing a Heart Attack

A heart attack occurs when the blood vessels that go to your heart become partially or totally blocked by fatty deposits causing the blood supply to be reduced or cut off. Oxygen and other nutrients can’t get to the cells of the heart and so the heart muscle begins to die. Although a heart attack can be brought on with exertion, most occur at times of rest.



The signs of a heart attack include

- pain or discomfort in the chest, arms, jaw, back, or stomach
- shortness of breath
- sweating
- light-headedness
- indigestion, nausea.

**If you suspect you or someone else is having a heart attack, call 911.** By calling 911, you enter the victim into the Emergency Medical System. The sooner treatment begins, the better the chance of reversing the process and saving a life.

## Are You Taking Aspirin?

Studies have shown that taking a low-dose aspirin every day lowers the risk of heart attacks. Aspirin is thought to work by helping to keep red blood cells from clumping together or forming a clot. A blood clot that forms in a blood vessel feeding the heart can cause a heart attack. If it forms in the brain, it causes a stroke.

It is recommended that people with diabetes take low-dose aspirin every day. Taking aspirin is not safe for everyone however, especially for those with allergies to aspirin, those on anticoagulant medications or those under 21 years of age. Talk to your health care provider about whether you should be taking aspirin.

**For additional information or to order a brochure on Heart Disease and Diabetes:**

- “Prevent Diabetes Problems. Keep Your Heart and Blood Vessels Healthy”. Publication from the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Disorders. No. 03-4283. September 2003. You can order online at [www.catalog.niddk.nih.gov](http://www.catalog.niddk.nih.gov) or you can call for one free copy at 1-800-860-8747.
- “The Heart of Diabetes”. Materials and tool kit from the American Heart Association. This program and the materials are available on-line. Register and receive regular communications and updates from the American Heart Association. Phone: 1-800-242-8721.

**References:**

“American Diabetes Association: Clinical Practice Recommendations 2007.” Diabetes Care. Vol. 30, January 2007.

Gottlieb, Sheldon. “A Good Heart”. Diabetes Forecast. Spring, 2007.

“Information about Diabetes: Diabetes, Heart Disease and Stroke”. From [www.diabetes.org](http://www.diabetes.org).

“Be Smart about Your Heart: Control the ABC’s of Diabetes”. From [www.ndep.nih.gov/](http://www.ndep.nih.gov/).



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This educational support tool is a product of the Maryland Diabetes Prevention and Control Program. The intent is to provide information specific to diabetes self-management for the public, especially people with diabetes and their families.

**\*\*If you would like to receive this tool each month, please send an email to the author, Daria Rovinski :**  
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